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Egyptian Foreign Policy after the 25 January Revolution: What Next?

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**AUTHOR:**

Andrew J. Stegall, LCDR, MSC, USN  
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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Edward J. Erickson

Approved: 

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Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Pauletta Otis

Approved: 

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## Executive Summary

**Title:** Egyptian Foreign Policy after 25 January Revolution: What Next?

**Author:** Lieutenant Commander Andrew J. Stegall, Medical Service Corps, United States Navy

**Thesis:** Egypt's post-transition foreign policy will be driven by pragmatic considerations and the increasing importance of resource access on the African landmass.

**Discussion:** Egypt's foreign policy has been driven by key influences. During the era of British colonial presence until 1952, the Egyptian monarchy acquiesced to British foreign policy and strategic goals. After the 1952 Free Officer's Coup, Gamal Nasser assumed leadership of Egypt. His personal vision and Pan-Arab goals would establish Egypt and emerging Arab governments and lead to multiple conflicts. By equating Egyptian and Arab policy but lacking Arab unity, Nasser doomed Egypt to the 1967 defeat and the reversal of his foreign and nationalist successes. Anwar Sadat followed Nasser and was as visible in foreign affairs as Nasser, but limited his goals to Egyptian considerations. His policies established peace with Israel, but led to Egyptian isolation in the Arab world. Regional standing was exchanged for greater international acceptance and alignment with the United States. Sadat also began the professionalization of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, though during his Presidency he limited its role by leading major diplomatic efforts at Camp David and with Israel. Hosni Mubarak continued the moderate policies, preferring to work behind the scenes to achieve Egypt's objectives and re-establish Arab links. While the leaders of Egypt directed Egyptian foreign policy, their ability to capitalize on opportunities and manipulate foreign influence, as well as assume risk, defines their eras. In the aftermath of the 25 January 2011 Revolution, Egyptian foreign policy faces multiple challenges. The traditional Israeli issues are beginning to fade as regime change in border nations and resource access in Africa become critical issues. As the population exerts influence it may become difficult for Egypt to solve the real problems due to the reactionary nature of the public and politicians.

**Conclusion:** Egyptian foreign policy has been directed by pragmatic, if unpopular or misunderstood objectives. As Egypt resolves domestic political issues and establishes a new government, there will be several key indicators as to the considerations driving foreign policy. If the military can maintain its traditional role and the Foreign Ministry retain professional staff, reactionary policies can be contained by pragmatic action.

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## Preface

Having lived and worked in Egypt, I acquired a special appreciation for Egyptian people and the role of Egypt in global affairs. As the largest Arab nation, Egypt's potential is vast and unrealized. Egypt is the natural leader for the region as well as being uniquely located to influence global events. Unfortunately the understanding of Egypt is limited and often colored by perceptions and stereotypes, particularly in the age of extremism. Egypt does have certain cultural characteristics, embraced by the population and illustrated brilliantly by Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz in his novels and short stories. My desire was show the complex nature of Egypt and how its history and other factors influence Egyptian foreign policy. The Egypt I know is complicated and raw, but friendly and pragmatic. I believe this also defines Egypt's relations within the international community.

I owe an extreme debt to my former colleagues Ms. Hanzada Adel Farid and Mr. Magued Ayad for assisting me in my travel to Egypt. Additionally, Ms. Farid provided a level of access to emerging leadership I would not normally receive, scheduling multiple interviews and accompanying me on my visits while patiently providing transport. This project would not have been possible without her valuable assistance. Mr. Ahmed Naguib provided initial guidance and led me to shape my research in manner that was both relevant and practical, leading to numerous late changes that Dr. Edward Erickson, my mentor, graciously accommodated. The time and information given by the numerous individuals over the course of this research reflected Egyptian hospitality and passion and cannot be repaid.

*For my Egyptian friends and readers, much is lost when translating the nuances of Egyptian Arabic to staid English and I apologize if the final result does not fully capture the emotion and full meaning of your descriptions.*

## **Introduction**

In Egypt, the outcome of the Arab Spring continues to develop. The 25 January Revolution, as Egyptians call these unprecedented changes, represents a seminal event in Egyptian and Middle Eastern history. Egypt maintains a key presence in the region, with the tides of global history frequently washing her shores. While the Arab Spring has reached several nations, no other state faces the pressure, influences and potential so much as Egypt. As the Arab “Spring Tide” gradually recedes, the initial cleansing is exposing difficult and serious challenges for the people and government of Egypt. It is uncertain how the political change and shifting domestic concerns of the 25 January Revolution will impact Egypt’s external role and foreign policy objectives.

Egypt resides in a key geographic location, serving as the land bridge between Africa and Asia and more recently, as the sea bridge between the East and West. Location has placed Egypt in the crosshairs of empires and created a repository society subject to the ideas and influences of global cultures. A visitor to this land will see the shadows of the Pharaohs, Greeks, Romans, Judaism, Nubians, Ottomans, and more recently Christianity, Islam, French-Anglo, Far Eastern and Western societies. Despite, and because of, these influences, Egypt developed a unique culture, stratified and influenced but not limited by the constraints of location and singularity. There is no single factor that drives Egyptian history or policy. In attempting to understand the direction Egypt will take with foreign policy, we must analyze the major influences that will impact foreign policy development.

With the past literally towering over life in Egypt, it is easy for additional shaping influences to pass unobserved. In addition to historical influences, drivers that will shape post-25

January Revolution foreign policy include: internal politics, popular support and opinion, foreign influence, military force and leadership. Influences will not be limited to these factors but they are the major components visible in recent Egyptian foreign policy. Popular unrest and other dramatic events, focusing on the perceived fault lines of Egyptian society and increasing religious/political cross-pollination, serve to overshadow the reality of Egyptian political decisions. Egypt consistently conducts sensible and self-serving foreign policy, often tempered by foreign influence, illustrating the limits of external and domestic reactionary and ideological influence. Even with the rise of an Islamist government, the pragmatic approach should not dramatically change. Popular opinion, with new outlets, will continue to focus on the more traditional regional issues residual to previous pan-Arab and anti-Israeli/colonial policies. The major, and subtle, shift is occurring as Egypt's pragmatic concerns become Nile water rights and other resource and economic issues related to the changing strategic picture in Africa. Based on this shift, Egypt's post-transition foreign policy will continue to be driven by pragmatic considerations and the increasing importance of resource access within the African land mass.

### **Shaping Influences**

#### **Internal Politics**

*Prior to establishing new external policies Egypt will need to resolve internal political debates and structure. To-date, Egypt has maintained a foreign policy reflecting the policies of previous administrations with slight adjustments based on emerging domestic political influences.*

In the year since Hosni Mubarak was ousted as president of Egypt, the military assumed the mantle of leadership in the guise of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). In

supporting the people and Revolution, the military abandoned its traditional position of supporting the executive. This is more significant by the fact that since the 1952 Free Officer's Revolution, the President of Egypt has been a senior member of the armed forces. It would appear that the military turned on one of its own. This simple explanation does not address military concerns with what was potentially a dynastic transfer of power to Gamal Mubarak, a son without a military background. Not that the military might disagree with a hereditary transfer, as long as it was to a "son" of the military. Even the late reinforcement of the Mubarak regime by the Director of the General Intelligence Directorate, General Omar Suleiman failed to stem popular, and possibly, military dissent.<sup>1</sup> In the best case, the military firmly aligned with the protestors, at worst, against Mubarak leaving no viable alternative to the ousting of Mubarak.

Once the SCAF assumed control of the Egyptian government, wholesale transition began. The pro-Mubarak National Democratic Party (NDP) became illegitimate, creating opportunity for old and new political parties. Uncomfortable with direct rule, the SCAF established a timeline for legislative, constitutional and executive shift. The immediacy of change quickly turned to bureaucratic deliberation, a much less photogenic change that soon led to a renewal of street protests.

As patience waned and frustration waxed, the SCAF began to coordinate with representatives of the major factions involved in the protests. This allowed the SCAF to share the burden of leadership, demonstrating a collaborative effort and legitimizing the parties while allowing the inclusion of their opinion in foreign policy. The systematic approach to forming a new government was planned to last roughly 18 months.<sup>2</sup> The first and second rounds of parliamentary elections occurred in the Fall and Winter of 2011, with parliament opening session on January 23, 2012. With this first benchmark complete, the re-drafting of the Egyptian

Constitution and Presidential elections became the prime domestic issue. Beyond the representative government, the SCAF also attended to the Ministries, the organizations that run the daily functions of the government.

On July 21, 2011, new ministers were sworn into serve Egypt.<sup>3</sup> This included professional diplomat Mohamed Kamel Amr as the Foreign Minister. By replacing the Mubarak-era ministers the SCAF took tangible political steps to address the concerns of the protestors and other parties. The current appointees, while free of the direct NDP/Mubarak taint, could face pressure from the military and the stronger political parties due to the nature of their temporary appointments. The SCAF is most likely unconcerned with questionable loyalty of the Ministers based on the military's traditional ability to conduct independent operations parallel to the government.

Anwar Sadat established a precedent in 1973 of staffing the key ministries with non-military professionals, marking a break with traditional military appointments.<sup>4</sup> This change has been integral to the functioning of the ministries during the last year. It also led to the creation of separate military links to foreign powers outside of normal diplomatic channels. The professionalization of the Ministry decoupled military objectives from foreign policy and resulted in important global positions being held by Egyptian diplomats. Dr. Bhutros Bhutros-Ghali became Secretary General of the United Nations from 1992-1996 and current Egyptian Presidential candidate Amr Mahmoud Moussa served as Secretary General of the Arab League from 2001 until 2011.<sup>5</sup> With an established and prestigious history of professionals, it would be unlikely that political changes will result in a less professional Ministry, though a key indicator will be the status of the current Foreign Ministry appointees after the Presidential elections and the continuing separation of military policy from foreign policy.

Temporary changes due to internal politics include increasing the Sinai security presence under the Egyptian-Israeli Camp David Accord agreements to address border and economic security. More dramatically, the opening of Gaza access points lessened Palestinian economic issues, reflecting popular political opinion. This action illustrates the emergence of inclusionary political processes. The significant outcome of the Arab Spring will be increasing political influence on the Foreign Ministry by political and legislative bodies representing popular opinion.

### **Popular Support and Opinion**

*The myth of a socialized group discussing and sharing opinions over tea, cigarettes and benign daily activities to form a unified, reasoned voice that matters has been dubbed the “Arab Street” in popular media. For Egypt this could be modified to the “Egyptian Square.” Like the real “Street,” the real “Square” in no way resembles the popular myth.*

The idea of an “Arab Street” conjures up a mental image that is quaint, reassuring and implies unity. Anyone who has ever trod a street in an Arab nation understands the fallacy of this notion. The true Arab street, like it’s metaphorical cousin, is an assault on all senses. A cacophony of noises competes with riots of colors and smells for your attention, changing with each block and person. As for influence, the less stout will thereafter avoid the street, taking from it what they want or was most memorable or perhaps what their guide presents. Within government, the voices may be heard, but not really listened to.

Viewing the throngs of protestors occupying Tahrir Square dominating the news cycles and analysts’ writings, it is easy to assume that a new phenomenon was occurring in Egypt. It appeared that a sudden and overwhelming outpouring of public opinion was swaying the

autocratic and military rulers of Egypt. In reality, Egyptians have always been vocal and physical in voicing their opinions. Displays of civil unrest such as the 1952 anti-British riots and 1977 Bread Riots were the primary means for the citizenry to exert influence on domestic issues.<sup>6</sup> The true phenomenon is that the regime actually listened. In recent years, public opinion had several ways to manifest, the most popular being the street, or “square” protest. While many protests may have been quasi-organized by the government or other parties, several events, especially in relation to foreign events and policies, appeared to be spontaneous.<sup>7</sup>

After the 1919 Revolution, Egyptian foreign policy remained relatively free of popular input. Governed by an occupied monarchy, hobbled by low literacy rates and a constrained press, there were few avenues that the average Egyptian could take to voice their opinion.<sup>8</sup> There are notable exceptions, usually within the framework of nationalism, where popular support for specific issues attempted to sway foreign policy decisions. The 1925 Libyan border demarcation negotiations with Italy incited significant popular and intellectual opinion, though ultimately it was British pressure that decided the final outcome.<sup>9</sup>

The ability of the population to unify towards a domestic nationalistic objective continues to be demonstrated. Translating this unity to influence on foreign policy has been limited, with minor impact on policy decisions. The effective application of a unified voice in creating leadership change portends further attempts to influence policy.<sup>10</sup> Based on the events occurring after the 2011 Israeli border incidents and subsequent storming of the Israeli Embassy, popular efforts to influence foreign policy have been reactionary and contained, following a traditional model. There may be new ways for voices to be heard via social media but pragmatic considerations continue to outweigh hasty reactive public attempts at influence.<sup>11</sup> The real benefit for Egypt is, and will be, using this voice as a foreign policy weapon. Recent events

indicate that the government continues to own the street, it remains to be seen if the street will eventually own the government.

### **Foreign Influence**

*The most influential factor in non-military related foreign policy actions and a key enabler for Egyptian military action has been the ability of outside nations to influence and even direct Egyptian foreign policy.*

Between independence in 1922 and revolution in 1952, it was virtually impossible for Egypt to conduct independent foreign policy due to the British colonial and economic presence. While British occupation officially ended in 1922, troops and advisors remained in Egypt until 1956.<sup>12</sup> Combined with European influence in Africa, Arabia and the Levant during this time, Egyptian foreign policy concerns were secondary to agreements made in the capitols of Europe. Egyptian leadership and people understood that Egypt should have a role both in the region and within the realm of Islam. However, during pre-World War II European colonial expansion and interference, Egypt lacked either the will or ability to conduct independent diplomacy.

Foreign considerations, in direct opposition to public opinion before the 1952 Revolution are best characterized by the 1933-34 Saudi-Yemeni conflict. The conflict, steeped in religious significance and territorial questions, included limited Italian support of the Yemeni forces. As nascent nations of little European interest, there was an absence of third party efforts to resolve the Arabian peninsular crisis. Egyptian nationalist parties, pan-Arab organizations and Islamic leaders pushed the Egyptian monarch King Faud to assume the mantle of peacemaker. Egyptian nationalist elements agitated for a pro-Yemeni stance, if only because it would place them in the anti-British camp by siding with the Italian-backed forces. As the largest Arab speaking nation

and hosting the center of Islamic learning at Al Azhar Mosque and University, regional organizations like the General Arab Union and General Islamic Congress encouraged Egypt to exercise moral weight and end the conflict.<sup>13</sup> Egyptian inaction exposed the depth of British influence and the King's inability to act beyond British regional strategy, trumping local and regional outcry. Egyptian nationalist parties, noting the King's weakness, were unable to force a different outcome. Even after the Monarchy was removed in 1952, Egyptian autocrats would continue to encounter foreign machinations.<sup>14</sup>

As Gamal Nasser consolidated power in Egypt after 1952, he completed negotiations for the withdrawal of British forces. Nasser leveraged American containment policy goals, pressuring Britain while avoiding commitment to the pro-West Baghdad Pact regional alliance.<sup>15</sup> Nasser initially displayed an ability to absorb foreign attempts at influence, reversing these into Egyptian gains without a *quid pro quo* requirement. Nasser termed this policy "positive neutrality," accepting the benefits of courtship but avoiding commitment<sup>16</sup>

For 10 years Nasser maintained a relatively independent foreign policy. Like the previous Monarchy, Nasser's autocratic powers included directing foreign policy. By coupling Pan-Arabism to Egyptian policy, he subjugated Egyptian goals to outside considerations. Eventually his overextension as an Arabist combined with domestic failures undermined Egypt's policy independence, leading to an era of foreign influence.

Between 1967 and 1972 the Soviets assumed a primary role in Egyptian affairs. The military, political and economic devastation of the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six Day War forced Nasser and later Anwar Sadat to embrace Soviet economic and military assistance. Eventually the Soviets would have over 20,000 troops in Egypt as well as base rights and other concessions.<sup>17</sup> Egypt sacrificed foreign policy and external goals for domestic considerations related to Israeli

military superiority and occupation of the Sinai Peninsula. This compromise destroyed any remaining vestiges of Nasserism and “positive neutrality” as well as negating the anti-colonial stance associated with both policies.

Post-Six-day War economic support from the oil producing Arab states assisted in re-militarization but that assistance came with strings attached and acceptance required the shedding of nationalist policies and eroded Egypt’s regional initiatives.<sup>18</sup> The Arab statesman to the last, Nasser’s literal final act was an effort to mediate the “Black September” strife between Jordanian forces and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in September 1970. Shortly after the departure of the representatives, Nasser would suffer a fatal heart attack.<sup>19</sup>

Nasser’s death in 1970 and Egypt’s military reconstitution allowed his successor, Anwar Sadat to return to the nationalist roots of 1952, resulting in the expulsion of the Soviets in 1972. Free of Soviet oversight and seeking a negotiating position, Sadat would initiate another war with Israel in 1973, ushering in the era of United States influence that would last until present times. Sadat, and later Mubarak, accepted overriding American interests as the cost of regaining territory and influencing Israel.

Colonial experience, Soviet domination and American subordination have defined foreign influence on Egypt. Territorial and security concessions combined with weak leadership provided the British undue influence over Egypt before 1952. After a brief period of relatively independent policy, military requirements after 1967 allowed the Soviets access to Egyptian resources and *de facto* alignment. The Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty in 1979 would isolate Egypt regionally, intensifying American influence.

These extreme situations have led to the highest levels of foreign influence in Egypt. During periods of internal normalcy, Egyptian leadership displayed an ability to recognize and

create opportunities to use foreign relations to their advantage. Under Mubarak, Egypt has been able to prioritize policy goals in a pragmatic, if domestically risky, approach to foreign influence.<sup>20</sup> Foreign influence in the near term will be a product of Egyptian economic conditions, favoring the United States and possibly the oil-producing Arab nations. American threats to delay or deny economic assistance will only push Egypt to seek support elsewhere though global economic conditions limit the number of nations able to fill a potential void. Avoiding external entanglements and improving economic conditions will allow Egypt to reduce foreign influence.

### **Military Force**

*Egypt has demonstrated the ability and will to use force to support foreign policy in three ways: during conventional territorial conflict with Israel, as a part of larger coalitions or alliances and to conduct irregular warfare to support an ideology. Foreign influence and logistical constraints have been the primary factors in limiting military options.*

Egypt maintains a large and capable military. Indigenous weapons manufacturing, strategic alliances and close U.S. military ties amplify prestige and capabilities particularly in relation to the region. Since the late 1970's, Egyptian military force is rarely used externally beyond coalition support operations, most recently in Afghanistan and during the First Gulf War.<sup>21</sup> These actions were not necessarily direct policy objectives, but indirectly supported larger goals of alliances and "Arab" participation. Recent Egyptian military deployments provided an "Arab face" to the benefit of coalition or Western actions. Egypt does have a history of sending military forces to support political objectives in the Israeli conflicts as well as Nasser's use of force in Yemen.

From 1962 until 1967, in what has become known as “Egypt’s Vietnam,” Egypt deployed 20,000 to 40,000 troops to support anti-royalist forces in South Yemen, marking the first major Egyptian military intervention on behalf of an indigenous nationalist movement and the first Egyptian offensive action against an Arab state.<sup>22</sup> The Yemeni civil war became a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, stressing the ideological divides between the revolutionary and conservative Arab regimes. By 1966, stability on the Israeli border began to dissipate as Arab states and Israel militarized, resulting in a devastating Egyptian military defeat in 1967 that led to regional and Yemeni disengagement and Soviet alignment.<sup>23</sup>

The 1967 Six Day War and withdrawal from stalemate in Yemen exposed the limitations and vast difference between goals and accomplishment regarding employment of military forces in foreign policy. By melding Egyptian and Pan-Arab foreign policy, Nasser placed Egypt in a risky position that depended on regional success. The loss of territory, failure of pan-Arabism, persistent conflict and economic crisis combined with Israel’s position of strength, limited Egyptian options. Internationally, the Suez Canal served as a demarcation line and remained closed, especially once the Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition began in 1969.<sup>24</sup> Efforts to negotiate a settlement to the conflict were initially shunned, with Nasser affirming the need for a military solution by stating, “what was lost in war, must be restored by war.”<sup>25</sup>

Nasser would not live to see the fourth war with Israel, dying of natural causes in 1970. His successor, Anwar Sadat, continued to prepare for limited military action in order reset the strategic and political conditions to remove Israel from Egyptian land. The 1973 Arab-Israeli War was an effort to reverse the territorial and psychological losses of the 1967 War. Egypt executed a bold offensive operation quickly achieving limited objectives. In conducting a limited war, Sadat realized his goal of re-taking a portion of the Sinai. However, the Israeli counter-

attack neutralized his gains and precipitated military crisis. By militarily asserting Egyptian policy, Sadat did redefine the diplomatic process and the strategic environment and was able to convert military failure to political gain.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the Yemen deployment, Egypt would provide advisors and smaller forces to support revolutionary movements and later, in a complete reversal, support for pro-Western conservative regimes. After Sadat's assassination in 1981, Egypt displayed a reluctance to use military force, or the threat of force, as a part of foreign policy. Regional political and geographic issues provided ample opportunity to engage in saber rattling but Egypt, having experienced the failures of military action and aligned militarily to the United States, removed the military component from foreign policy.

Egypt maintains a credible offensive military capability. Provided that relations with Israel do not deteriorate, the military role in foreign policy will continue as a part of alliances or coalitions to strengthen Egyptian positions in regional organizations. The inability to project significant force without assistance will limit any application of military power to future foreign policy goals. While air strikes and raids are possible, only conflict with an immediate neighbor should include the wholesale application of the military. The heavy influence of the military in Egyptian politics will also shape the decisions to use force. If the legislature can shape the new constitution and a non-military executive is elected, the danger of force as a foreign policy tool may rise.

### **Leadership**

*Egypt's foreign policy direction has been determined by the objectives of individual leaders. As each leader has changed, so have the roles of advisors and the objectives of foreign policy.*

Between 1956 and 2011, Egypt had three rulers. Gamal Nasser served as president until his natural death in 1970, Anwar Sadat, assassinated in 1981, followed Nasser and Hosni Mubarak, who resigned in 2011, succeeded Sadat. The single constant in recent Egyptian leaders has been military experience. All these men came directly from, and held, senior military positions, and were directly chosen by their predecessor. Each leader would establish their own brand of foreign policy with varying degrees input from advisors but clearly centralizing foreign policy within the executive.

Immediately following the 1952 Free Officers Coup, Egypt was officially governed by the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) in a manner similar to the current SCAF model.<sup>27</sup> This placed a military leader in authority working with a council to achieve consensus. While the Free Officers projected unity, Gamal Nasser consolidated power, emerging as the President and obtaining the unfettered ability to direct Egyptian foreign policy.

Egyptian foreign policy under Nasser became tied to the international force of personality and ideals that Nasser would project and was self described as “reactive.”<sup>28</sup> Initially, Nasser’s successes became Egypt’s successes and eventually Arab successes as Nasser was driven by displays of independence. The danger to Egypt of this symbiotic relationship would become evident over time, eventually leading to the disaster of 1967. By assuming the mantle of Arab leadership, Nasser went beyond the role of Egypt, creating a situation of inequality with other Arab nations that limited Egyptian policy maneuver space, forcing Egypt into precarious positions.<sup>29</sup> Egyptians accepted the singular policy direction, demonstrating massive popular support for Nasser even after the 1967 debacle, illustrating the domestic success of Nasserism. Nasser’s popular support did not completely carry over to his advisors in government, as some began to press for a Western solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>30</sup> Nasser’s advisors owed their

positions to him and therefore had limited ability to influence Egyptian policy beyond any personal connections with Gamal Nasser. Unable to completely abandon nationalist policies, and forced to compromise for Soviet assistance, it would take Nasser's death to initiate policy change under a new visionary.

As a member of the Free Officer's Movement, Anwar Sadat worked closely with Nasser from revolutionary inception and through his presidency, though he was never a close advisor.<sup>31</sup> In opposite to Nasser's reactive policies, Sadat sought to create opportunity. Initially, Sadat transformed Egyptian government by placing civilians in key ministerial positions, including foreign affairs, leading to a professionalization of government service.<sup>32</sup> As the Egyptian executive, Sadat, directed a shift away from the Arabist doctrine of Nasser, focusing on the immediate problems of Egypt. Sadat identified the US, as Israel's largest supporter, as critical to exerting influence on the Jewish state and he considered Saudi fence mending and expulsion of the Soviets as ways to access American influence.<sup>33</sup> After expelling the Soviets and re-aligning with Arab states, Sadat was unable to exert influence on Israel or the US, primarily because the Israelis were not pressured under the status quo. Sadat's cooperative policy with Arab nations would prove much more viable than Nasser's unification efforts and demonstrate the rapid change that singular policy direction can take.<sup>34</sup> It would take a feat of arms or other action to motivate Israel and the international community to initiate a peace process.

Sadat would take two major actions demonstrating the power of the Egyptian presidency: the 1973 war and the Camp David Accords. Both would serve Egyptian interests with almost no consideration for the previous Pan-Arab policies of Nasser. Equating himself as both the "Hero of the Crossing" and the "man of peace" Sadat established domestic and international credibility, however diametrically opposed those titles may be.<sup>35</sup> The "man of peace" would pay for his

actions in a violent public assassination. His Vice President, Hosni Mubarak, would assume leadership, instituting his own brand of foreign policy.

If Sadat's foreign policy focused on correcting the defeats of Nasser, Mubarak would focus on correcting the victories of Sadat. Mubarak sought mediation and compromise as way of demonstrating Egyptian independence and power. Mubarak's main objective was to restore Egypt's Arab relations after being ostracized as a result of the Israeli peace accords.<sup>36</sup> Mubarak was able to achieve this through emerging intra-Arab strife as well as the threat posed by Iran's fundamentalist regime to the Gulf monarchies. Regional conflict allowed Mubarak to hasten Egypt's mediator status but Israeli ties continued to diminish Egyptian stature with the Arab people as Egypt remained silent in the face of Israeli military actions against Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, the Palestine Liberation Front, and continuing occupation of Gaza and the West Bank.<sup>37</sup> Mubarak re-established Soviet ties, desiring greater options with Egyptian international relations. Mubarak was able to transition Egyptian importance to the United States by shifting Egypt's value as a counter to Islamic extremism.<sup>38</sup>

Egypt's leaders over the last 60 years have acted as the primary drivers for foreign policy. Each leader established priorities and objectives for Egypt based on personal reasons. All three presidents displayed pragmatic decision-making and the ability to quickly change policy as influences and requirements shifted. The centralized leader is able to unilaterally act, with little or no public or peer consent. Because their advisors and government functionaries served more as personal advisors, dissent and advice were rarely tolerated. Sadat professionalized the Foreign Ministry, but still controlled major policy decisions as evidenced by the consecutive resignations of three foreign ministers during the critical Israeli peace talks.<sup>39</sup> Future Egyptian leadership ability to act in such a singular fashion will be greatly determined by the constitutional powers

established by the 100-member committee and ratified by popular vote according to the SCAF timeline. If a prime minister position is created, the legislature may be able to exert greater influence reflecting popular opinion on foreign policy. If the executive power retains authority, then individual objectives will continue to shape policy. In either case, immediate pragmatic concerns as determined by the primary power player, whether an executive, military council or consensus legislature, will continue to decide the direction of Egyptian policy.

### **Current Situation**

After the ousting of Mubarak, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) assumed governance. The SCAF is a conglomerate of 20 senior military officers including the commanders of each branch of service with the Minister of Defense, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, functioning as the de-facto president. The SCAF has stated that their role is to act as a caretaker government, providing stability and time for the democratic process to develop.

The process has three distinct phases: parliamentary elections, drafting a constitution and presidential elections culminating in June 2012.<sup>40</sup> The primary focus for the SCAF is internal political and domestic issues as well as securing and safeguarding the military's role and status. While the military influences and has previously conducted foreign policy, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry is functioning and operating while carrying out executive fiats.

In the year since the 25 January Revolution, Egypt has maintained normal diplomatic and foreign relations. Adjusting to changing regional governments and situations has provided challenges and successes. Egyptian transition has limited and curtailed the natural role of Egypt

in the region, but Egypt has been able to take advantage of several openings to address old and new challenges.

Developing relations with the transitional Libyan government is an immediate challenge, particularly with concerns of cross-border weapons flow and extensive economic cooperation.<sup>41</sup> After five years and consistent failure, Egyptian diplomats and envoys orchestrated the freeing of Israeli soldier Gilad Shilat from Palestinian Hamas captivity, resolving one of the many Hamas-Fatah-Israeli roadblocks. This effort brought all sides to the table and has led to continuing Hamas-Fatah unification discussions.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, Egypt has maintained relatively normal relations with Israel including negotiating adjustments to the Camp David agreements to increase the military/security presence in the Sinai and addressing terror attacks against Israel. The current leadership has displayed an ability to balance the needs and responses of Israel while accounting for anti-Israeli domestic pressure.

The current Foreign Minister, Mohamed K. Amr is a professional diplomat with extensive African and international experience. While the Ministry has undergone leadership changes, including senior personnel entering politics, the short-term Egyptian goals are to “maintain and strengthen” bi and multi-lateral relations.<sup>43</sup> The Ministry highlights the importance of Egyptian participation in regional and international organizations as well as the challenge of developing relations with emerging regional governments. Included in the Ministry’s goals is an understanding of the links between international standing and access to economic assistance.<sup>44</sup> Commitments to existing agreements and acknowledgement of Egypt’s responsibilities in the international community provide a framework for whatever form of government emerges.

## Analysis

The sudden and surprising changes that can occur in the Middle East, illustrated by the Arab Spring, provide a measure of caution when conducting analysis of events in the region. Historical depth, especially in Egypt, and similarity to the 1952 Coup allow for comparison and provide an idea of direction. Uncertainty is clearly the most frustrating status, for the researcher and more importantly, the people of Egypt. Barring a major destabilizing event and continuing on the projected domestic path, even shakily, the direction of foreign relations should remain fairly normal.

Immediately after the 25 January Revolution a major foreign policy concern was the impact to Egyptian relations with Israel. Having fought four major wars while maintaining low intensity conflict with Israel between 1948 and 1973, the potential for hostilities might be considered significant. Initial analysis indicates that there is no significant issue that would lead to conflict.<sup>45</sup> Even the extreme Islamist Salafi Nour Party has shown a desire to avoid armed conflict with Israel and have stated their commitment, on Israeli Army Radio no less, to the 1979 Peace Treaty.<sup>46</sup> With the Egyptian-Israeli relationship stable, the primary areas of concern become border instability, Arab League and other coalition stability operations and Nile water access.

Continuing political dissension in Libya, and the declaration of an autonomous region in oil-rich eastern Libya, has increased instability on Egypt's western border.<sup>47</sup> Egypt and Libya have a history of border disputes, including the launching of Egyptian airstrikes in 1977 on Libyan military sites.<sup>48</sup> Continuing discord within the Libyan National Transitional Council could lead to the fracture of Libya. The availability of resources combined with efforts to create

a strategic security alliance, may lead to Egypt supporting the breakaway region. In similar fashion, Egypt has seen national fractures in all of its borders. The Palestinian Authority separating along Hamas and Fatah political lines in 2006 and more recently South Sudan ceding from Sudan. Physical separation of the Palestinian Authority combined with Israeli security has prevented major conflict, but the simmering strife between Sudan and South Sudan continues.<sup>49</sup>

Egypt has stressed commitment to the Arab League and African Union, and the presidential candidate Amr Moussa is a former Arab League Secretary General and Mubarak-era Egyptian Foreign Minister. Egypt maintains leadership of the Arab League but a lack of consensus with all members has reduced effectiveness, and efforts at regional stability have centered on American and Chinese diplomacy, particularly in Sudan. Egypt's ability to leverage American and Chinese support while displaying Arab unity through the Arab League, represents the best opportunity to influence conflict and potential conflict on Egypt's borders. The threat from Egypt's southern border is not limited to conflict, as nations who access the Nile for water demand revision of the Nile water use agreements.<sup>50</sup>

The primary Nile use agreement is based on the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement between Sudan and Egypt and the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian Agreement. These agreements allocated the lion's share of Nile water use to Egypt as well as providing Egypt veto power of any Nile use projects along the watercourse. The legal issue revolves around the legitimacy of the 1929 agreement since the British, as the colonial power, negotiated on behalf of the Nile basin countries. There are ten nations that access the Nile, with Egypt as an end user. In 1999 these nations established the Nile Basin Initiative to review Nile use and to establish a new agreement based on population and agriculture in all Nile Basin countries. By 2009 the Nile Basin Initiative presented a new agreement reducing Egyptian allocations and removing Egypt's ability to veto

any revision. Egypt declined to support these changes. While negotiations continue, it is unlikely that Egypt will allow the removal of the favorable aspects of the original agreements. With South Sudan becoming the eleventh nation requiring Nile access, increasing agriculture and potential hydroelectric projects stalled, there is growing pressure to resolve the Nile access issues. Egypt's claims are based on historical use and Nile dependency. While refusing to sign a new agreement that limits their current access, Egypt is engaged in extensive diplomatic and collaborative efforts with the Nile Basin countries through the Foreign Ministry and international organizations.<sup>51</sup>

Privately, it is doubtful that Egypt would completely rule out military action to guarantee Nile water access. As recently as 2009, the Egyptian military may have been planning for Nile Basin contingencies.<sup>52</sup> To date, cooperation and alignment with Sudan has been the hallmark of Egypt's Nile policy. Future military action, due to distance and airspace, would most likely require Sudanese cooperation as well as international cover from China, who maintains economic interests in Sudan and has previously blocked international action against Sudan.<sup>53</sup> The risk of a military option to enforce Egyptian primacy over the Nile, increases with Sudan/South Sudan conflict since either side might support Egyptian action in exchange for military assistance. While military action is always a risk, the international and logistic constraints for Egypt would outweigh the risks. Egypt seems comfortable stalling the Basin Initiative based on domestic transition and current policies though the Foreign Ministry appears to recognize that this issue will be a critical area for the incoming government. Egyptian leverage of American and Chinese influence over the Nile Basin countries could be used to maintain Egyptian Nile rights or used to garner additional international and Basin economic support in exchange for re-negotiating the Nile Agreements.

## Conclusion

In exercising independent foreign policy Egypt does not traditionally aim for the popular objective, but the pragmatic. At varying times since 1952, Egyptian foreign policy managed to alienate the British, French, Americans, Soviets (twice), the entire Arab League and Egypt's own population (frequently). If there is a consistent theme to Egyptian foreign policy it appears that it may be that someone will end up angry. The ability to demonstrate fluid and flexible foreign policy regardless of domestic or foreign influence to achieve pragmatic objectives is the real constant. Hence, if we identify the future pragmatic concerns of Egypt, we can possibly anticipate foreign policy decisions even if we are unable to ascertain who might be making them.

Historically, revolutions and leadership changes in Egypt were led by the military or imposed by colonial dictate. This trend continued as the military played a key role in the days of protest and eventual removal of Hosni Mubarak from power. In similar fashion to the 1952 Revolution, the military could be considered the “vanguard” of the Revolution.<sup>54</sup>

As the military oversees the transition of power it is clear that they are not interested in managing the domestic issues facing Egypt.<sup>55</sup> As the most powerful element of government in Egypt the military appears to recognize its role in stability and maintaining international relations. Whatever the outcome of the Egyptian political process the military desires to maintain relative autonomy. Some Egyptians see this as unpalatable but the reality is that the military serves as a check and balance to the other parts of government. This becomes more important when considering the possibility of a reactive legislature or executive.

Senior Egyptian military and government professionals have been serving Egypt since the years of Nasser. This experience has forged a pragmatic and realistic foreign outlook that

understands the risks and impacts of conflict.<sup>56</sup> Having spent 30 years under Hosni Mubarak establishing leadership roles in diplomacy and international affairs, it is doubtful that the cadre of officials would abandon this system. However, if an extremist government emerges from the 25 January Revolution, an abandonment of these positions may occur in response to domestic reactionary pressure. A key indicator of this will be the future of the Camp David Accords. Any removal or cancellation of the Israeli Peace Treaty might portend further erosion of diplomacy and increase the risk of aggression in other contentious areas. A reactionary government that brands the Egyptian diplomatic successes since 1977 as failures associated with the Mubarak regime will be the greatest risk to Egypt.

## **Appendix A: List of Interviewees**

From December 19-28, 2011 I conducted a series of interviews, conversations and discussions in Cairo, Egypt. The following is a list of the individuals who provided their insight and thoughts on the future of Egypt and the momentous events since The 25 January Revolution. In addition several individuals I spoke with requested to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of discussing Egyptian issues with an American.

Ms. Hanzada Adel Farid

Embassy of the United States, Cairo, Egypt

Mr. Magued Ayad

United States Naval Medical Research Unit No. 3, Cairo, Egypt

Mr. Omar Bassem

Technology and Prime Ministerial Advisor

Mr. Farouk Breesh

Owner, F.B. Stables, Giza, Cairo, Egypt

General Sameh Seif Elyazal

Candidate for Egyptian Vice Presidency

Chairman, Al Gomhouria Center for Political and Security Studies and Research

Dr. Moataz A. Fattah

Director, House of Wisdom Strategic Studies

Mr. Mohamed Gabr

Attorney and founding member of the Justice Party

Mr. Ahmed Naguib

Advising and Exchanges Director for AMIDEAST, Social Media Consultant and Activist

## Endnotes

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- <sup>5</sup> Arab Republic of Egypt Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Webpage, [www.mfa.gov.eg/English/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.mfa.gov.eg/English/Pages/default.aspx)
- <sup>6</sup> David Hirst and Irene Beeson, *Sadat* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 242-246.
- <sup>7</sup> Author's personal experiences in Cairo, Egypt from 2003-2007 and based on conversations with Egyptian and expatriate colleagues residing in Egypt between 2007-2012.
- <sup>8</sup> Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Johnson and Barak A. Salmoni, eds., *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919-1952*, (New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 373.
- <sup>9</sup> Goldschmidt, Johnson and Salmoni, 49.
- <sup>10</sup> Wael Ghonim, "Charlie Rose talks to Wael Ghonim," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, February 20-26, 2012, 20.
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- <sup>12</sup> Kirk J. Beattie, *Egypt During the Nasser Years*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 18.
- <sup>13</sup> Goldschmidt, Johnson and Salmoni, 55-56.
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- <sup>15</sup> Beattie, 114.
- <sup>16</sup> Beattie, 119.
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- <sup>18</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, eds., *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 104.
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- <sup>20</sup> General (Ret) Sameh Seif Elyazal, conversation with author, December 26, 2011.
- <sup>21</sup> Author's conversations with Egyptian military personnel, October, 2005.
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- <sup>23</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 103.
- <sup>24</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Israel, A History*, (New York: Harper, 2008), 410.
- <sup>25</sup> Gilbert, 410.
- <sup>26</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 105.
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- <sup>29</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 103.
- <sup>30</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 104.
- <sup>31</sup> David Hirst and Irene Beeson, 80.
- <sup>32</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 165.
- <sup>33</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 104.
- <sup>34</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 104-105.
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- <sup>44</sup> Arab Republic of Egypt Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Official Web Site: <http://www.mfa.gov.eg/English/>
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